

Ordination by Media?

**Analysis of news texts constructing the debate over women's ordination to the priesthood
in the Anglican Church of Australia in four daily newspapers, 1987-1992.**

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Abstract

Over 200 news texts that construct the debate over the ordination of women to the priesthood in the Anglican Church of Australia are analysed. Attention is drawn to modal and modal-like constructions of credibility for news actors in verbal text and in photographs. Focus is placed also on the construction of affective mental processes and emotion, producing social affinity between reader-viewer and represented participant. This approach follows Kress and van Leeuwen, who combine social semiotics and functional linguistics, and propose a 'grammar' of visual images.

Attention is paid also to the contributing discourses to the ordination debate, both theological and feminist. It is demonstrated that the press disguised a complex discursive reality with many competing meanings between theological traditions and between feminisms. It is argued that the press have constructed the debate in 'the social'. Within 'the social' three 'discourses' are recognised: democratic-legislative; progress (reflecting Enlightenment thought); and unity, the latter two being measured against the former. It is argued that press evaluation has produced a 'mediated theological orthodoxy' in 'the social'.

It is concluded that credibility evaluations must be viewed in the light of the structuring characteristics of news discourse reflecting the market orientation of the industry. 'Ordination by media' points to an implicit ideological predisposition, but not a conscious press commitment to women's ordination.

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